

4

Purposes and Philosophies of Adult Education

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This chapter discusses the purposes and philosophies of adult education. Purposes, as defined here, are the basic reasons for conducting adult education; purposes are translated into practice. In some cases, purposes are derived from ideals, to abet the so-called good society or to help individuals achieve their true potential, for example. In other cases, however, purposes derive from more operational concerns such as making a profit or improving organizational effectiveness.

Philosophies are the beliefs about the way in which adult education should be conducted and the general principles that guide practice. As Elias and Merriam (1980, p. 3) point out, philosophies are integrated sets of propositions and “are the foundations or basic structures by which phenomena, events and realities are understood.” The study of the philosophy of adult education is systematic and essentially intellectual. Clearly, purposes and philosophies are interrelated. Yet they are also conceptually distinct.

One might take the position that philosophy is the guiding principle behind practice, and that being so, the chapter should begin with philosophy as the focus and proceed to demonstrate how purposes derive from philosophy. Indeed, such an approach is defensible, and authors such as Elias and Merriam, who discuss liberal, progressive, behaviorist, humanistic, radical, and analytical approaches, have aptly taken this course. In a similar vein, Apps (1985) argues that philosophy should guide practice and goes on to demonstrate how the application of philosophical inquiry could improve practice.

However, after reviewing the general professional books of the field from the 1920s to the present, I have concluded that the reverse may be

a more accurate description of the field's development in North America. Philosophy, for the most part, has developed from purpose, because adult education has been more affected by the social function it serves than by the thought systems associated with it. Adult education exists as a field of practice and inquiry today because it serves a vital social function. To be sure, adults have always been educated. Yet in American society, formal, systematic, institutionalized adult education has become indispensable because the extension of formal learning beyond youth is necessary if society is to function. This need derives in part from the growth of mass society and social dynamism and in part from the great increase in technical knowledge brought about by the scientific revolution.

As societies become larger, a specialized division of labor is required to maintain the economic, distribution, and governance systems upon which the social order depends. Given specialization, not all that one needs to learn in order to function can be learned during youth, because the general and theoretical knowledge learned during youthful education must be refined through application if adult tasks are to be performed competently. At the same time, rapid social change has meant that knowledge quickly becomes irrelevant, and hence what one learns during childhood must constantly be updated, revised, and supplemented.

Along with the trend toward a mass society, and related to it, has been what is often referred to as the scientific revolution. Scientific reasoning has enabled us to understand the physical universe to a degree never before known, and advances in knowledge have been constantly translated into technological development. Technological development stimulates social change and makes constant retraining in the workplace a requisite for productivity. As Cremin (1970) suggests, the roots of this social imperative for adult education go back to colonial times and "take off" during the Industrial Revolution.

Adult education was first recognized as a vital component of our educational system during the 1920s. During this decade, the term *adult education* first came into general usage (Hart, 1927), and the adult education movement was launched. If the purposes of adult education derive primarily from its social function, it is more fruitful to organize this chapter around purposes and to discuss philosophy in respect to them. This is the course I have chosen.

Over the years, many authors have proposed purposes for adult education. Reviewing the literature, Hallenbeck (1964) notes Bryson's functions, which are remedial, relational, liberal, and political; Halsey's functions, which are remedial, assimilative, mobility promoting, and compensatory; and Peers's function, which is developing responsible citizens in a democratic society. Verner (1964) divides purposes into expansional, participational, integrational, and personal, and Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) categorize aims and objectives as cultivation of the intellect, individual self-actualization, personal and social improvement, social transformation, and organizational effectiveness.

As one reviews the functions and purposes proposed by others, however, it becomes clear that the basic purposes of adult education can be collapsed into four major categories: (1) to facilitate change in a dynamic society, (2) to support and maintain the good social order, (3) to promote productivity, and (4) to enhance personal growth. These categories of purpose are interrelated. Success or failure in achieving one affects all others.

To Facilitate Change in a Dynamic Society

So much has been said about the need for lifelong learning in the age of "knowledge explosions," knowledge "half-lives," rapid technological change, and "future shock" that we sometimes are led to believe that such concerns are purely contemporary. They are not. As Hart (1927, p. vii) notes in one of the first books with the words *adult education* in the title, "Within the last century, education, having become more or less completely identified with schooling, has been allocated almost exclusively to the period of childhood and youth. This has enabled adult generations to avoid and escape education. All this has taken place in a century of unprecedented industrial and social change—a century that should, because of those changes, have devoted a major part of its energies to the education of adults for intelligent living in this changed world."

This theme is echoed throughout the literature from Hart's time to the present. As noted earlier, this purpose of education derives from adults' need to remain current in the wake of rapid change and increasing knowledge. It has two dimensions, one social, the other material.

On the social dimension, as values, attitudes, and beliefs change, so do social role expectations. As role expectations change, so must the behavior of adults change, for if it does not, inappropriate role behavior results (Mortimer and Simmons, 1978). Inappropriate role behavior is generally sanctioned negatively, thus making life quite difficult for the adult who fails to comprehend social change and to act accordingly. The need to comprehend changes in expected role behavior and to change accordingly has been the basic purpose behind much of the adult education that developed within the women's movement. It has also been a propelling force behind parent education and in many continuing professional education programs in fields such as medicine, law, and nursing.

Rapid change in a material sense pertains to the rapid change in knowledge needed to perform specialized tasks—change so rapid that adults must continuously update themselves if tasks are to be performed adequately. This is perhaps most true in the scientific and technical occupations in which there has been a phenomenal growth in technical knowledge and a concomitant increase in industrial training, staff development, and continuing professional education. The burgeoning of knowledge and constant need for updating is not restricted to technical fields alone, however, for increases in the objective knowledge of science and technology in turn affect the more relational aspects of the workplace and society in general. For example, as

the amount of technical knowledge increases, no one person can comprehend it all. Hence, fields of knowledge break down into specialties, and work becomes organized into specialized functions. This specialization dramatically increases the need for communication and coordination among specialized units and results in a demand for more efficient management and management training.

To Support and Maintain the Good Social Order

Obviously, the way in which the good social order is maintained and supported depends on what is considered to be good. In the American tradition, it has generally been accepted that the good order is embodied in democracy. True democracy, however, is considered by most authors to be an ideal that can be achieved only through conscious effort.

That a major purpose of adult education is to promote the democratic order is an idea with strong roots in the early adult education movement. The logic was as simple as it was powerful: Democracy can work only if the citizenry exercises rational, informed, choice, for in the absence of informed, rational choice, propaganda prevails, and democracy lapses into totalitarianism.

Furthermore, true democracy requires active participation on the part of the citizenry. Since the electorate are adults, it is the purpose of adult education to assist in informing and developing critical skills. Lindeman (1926, p. 46) recognized the relationship between adult education and democracy when he wrote, "We do not acquire freedom—we grow into freedom." Baker (1936, p. 11) expanded on that theme: "The preservation of our civilization depends upon the ability of our democracy to suspend judgment until all the facts are known, to resist prejudices, to permit intellect to rule over feelings. The sort of education that cultivates such ability must be continuous and common to all people through the whole of the United States."

Although an informed, critical-thinking citizenry is necessary for democracy, it is not sufficient. Participation is also required, and this too was considered to be a purpose of adult education. As Sheats, Jayne, and Spence (1953, p. 21) wrote, "If democracy means government by the governed, we can not delegate citizenship! Every individual competent to pull his own load must reserve a spot in his life for direct participation in the management of his political and economic affairs, and it should be a major objective of adult education to assist adults to manage these affairs with competence."

The participation theme is echoed by Bergevin (1967, p. 35) who wrote, "There is little doubt that, if democracy is to survive, citizens must participate intelligently in the affairs of the various institutions that constitute democratic society. And intelligent participation is predicated on learning."

Another theme that persists from Hart (1927) to Brookfield (1984a) is the notion that the good democratic society requires good community rela-

tionships. One product of the advent of mass society is the breakdown of communities based on face-to-face relationships (*gemeinschaft*) into communities based on impersonal organization (*gesellschaft*). As Sheats, Jayne, and Spence and others note, this breakdown can result in alienation and social disenfranchisement. The task of adult education then, is to assist in building groups within communities that identify common problems and that participate together in solving them. The themes of enlightening the citizenry, participation, and community are central to the notion of the good democratic order espoused by most of the authors who identify with the adult education movement. In the Johnson era, however, a different but compatible theme seemed to gain more currentness, and that was the notion of equality as embodied in economic opportunity.

The logic behind economic opportunity is that American society had produced an underclass of persons who could not rise in the system because social requisites such as education had been denied them. For a society to be democratic, all members should have an equal chance for socioeconomic success. Hence, the conditions that had produced unequal opportunity, such as prejudice and unequal access to resources, should be eliminated.

Economic opportunity, as a purpose of adult education, found expression in the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which provided the first substantial federal funding for adult literacy. In 1966, responsibility for adult literacy was transferred from the Office of Economic Opportunity to the Office of Education by the Adult Education Act (Title III of the 1966 Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act).

Generally speaking, mainstream adult educators have considered the American system to be basically good, albeit capable of improvement through adult education. Given this general perspective, in this country there has not been an extensive radical tradition that has sought to eliminate the current system and to replace it with another. This is not the case in many developing countries, where the radical ideas of Paulo Freire (1970, 1973) and others have had great impact.

To Promote Productivity

The third general purpose of adult education, to promote productivity, is manifest on two levels. The first is the organizational or institutional level where adult education is conducted to enhance individual performance as a means toward increasing organizational effectiveness. Adult education at this level is typically termed training, staff development, or human resource development, although the term *human resource development* frequently includes other development strategies in addition to education—strategies such as compensation.

Adult education is also used to promote productivity at the societal level, the second level discussed here. At this level human capital theory comes to the fore and is used to justify public subsidy of adult education programs that enhance the productivity of the general economy.

The Organizational Level. Ideas about adult education at the organizational level, particularly in the workplace, have changed substantially since the beginning of the adult education movement in the 1920s. Thinkers such as Lindeman were more concerned with the personal development of the worker than they were with productivity and profit. As Lindeman (1926, p. 26) wrote, "We stand in need of a revolution of the mind—not a mere exchange of power-groups—before an economic revolution can transform industry into a cooperative enterprise, before 'power over' is transposed into 'power with' in industry." Intellectuals such as Lindeman, Hilda Smith, and others believed that a failure to understand the workplace and its relation to society weakened workers and that an understanding of economics, sociology, and politics in relation to real experience would empower the working class. This notion persisted into the 1950s when John Walker Powell (1956, p. 134) wrote, "What should a man know about his means of livelihood? Well, does he know the role of his industry or business or profession within the nation's whole economy? Does he think about what his work contributes to that industry or business or profession? . . . These are samples of what one might suppose would be concerns of the thinking worker."

Today the intellectual tradition of education in the workplace has given way to a utilitarian vision that seeks to maximize organizational effectiveness through the enhancement of employee or member competence. Nadler (1982) distinguishes among *training*, which is designed to improve employees' performance in their present jobs, *education*, which prepares employees for future, well-defined positions in the organization, and *development*, which is learning for the general growth of the individual or organization. Training, which is oriented toward a specific job, is highly systematic in Nadler's Critical Events Model, and in the designs of most other training-oriented adult educators as well. The training process generally begins with job or task analysis which results in setting precise learning objectives. Then methods are selected, training is conducted and evaluated, and the results of evaluation are fed back into the design process. Most authors in the training field caution that training should be used only as an organizational strategy when the problem to be solved results from the worker's inability to perform a task because of a lack of skills or knowledge.

The Societal Level. At the societal level, human capital theory is often used as a justification for the public subsidy of adult education. The logic is that human skills and knowledge attained through education, as well as monetary capital, are vital to economic growth. It follows that public subsidy of education, which promotes general productivity, is a form of social investment because society benefits as well as the individual learner. Public subsidy is warranted when the net benefit to society is more than the individual's private benefit (Beder, 1981). Adult literacy, the Cooperative Extension Service, and adult vocational education have benefited from this point of view.

Adult literacy is a particularly good case in point. For economic growth to occur, a basic infrastructure must be in place. This includes a transpor-

tation system, since raw materials must get to the point of production and to the consumer, once produced. The infrastructure also includes an energy delivery system to distribute power production. Most important for adult literacy, however, an adequate infrastructure requires an efficient communication system that can accumulate knowledge as well as transmit it—a system that depends on the written word and spoken English. As a society, we are willing to allocate public monies for adult literacy because in doing so, everyone benefits from the economic growth an efficient communication system promotes.

To Enhance Personal Growth

The notion that the purpose of adult education is to facilitate personal growth is a recurrent theme in the literature of the field and has several manifestations. An idea prevalent in the early adult education movement was that the objective of personal growth was the production of “the whole person” (Jacks, 1936, p. 4). The whole person concept derives from traditional liberal education. The whole person is one who can think rationally and critically, who has a refined aesthetic sense, who is of high moral character, and who maintains good physical conditioning. In the whole person, these qualities are synthesized into a total unity. While production of whole persons had previously been relegated to youth, the early writers on adult education felt the goal should be lifelong.

Similar to the notion of the whole person is the notion that the objective of personal growth is maturity. As Bergevin (1967, p. 7) expressed, “The term ‘maturity’ is used here to mean the growth and development of the individual towards wholeness in order to achieve constructive spiritual, vocational, physical, political and cultural goals. A maturing person is continually advancing towards understanding and constructive action in the movement from mere survival (the state of lower animals) to the discovery of himself both as a person and responsible member of society.” Knowles (1980, p. 29), following Overstreet (1949), noted that maturity includes “linkages with life,” personal growth but within a social context. Indeed, the concept of maturity focuses heavily on humans as social animals who must live productively and responsibly within society to be whole and fully functioning.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, the field of adult education was influenced by the humanist school of psychology. The concepts of personal growth espoused by thinkers such as Maslow and Rogers find expression in one of the most widely read books on adult education in the last twenty years, Knowles’s *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (1980). For those of the humanist school, the object of adult education is to assist learners in exercising the quality that separates humans from other animals—the ability to choose. Given this goal, adult education becomes highly learner centered, and the adult educator functions primarily as a facilitator. Maslow (1954) interjected the concept of self-actualization as a goal of personal growth—becoming all one is capable of becoming.

More recently, Mezirow (1981) has proposed the concept of *perspective transformation* as a very significant purpose of adult education. Building on the work of the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas, Mezirow theorizes that through education, adults can (and often need to) undergo entire shifts in consciousness that result in their perceiving themselves and society in completely new and more productive ways.

Personal growth oriented programs operate on at least three levels—on what Bryson (1936) terms the *relational level*, on the *self-actualization level*, and on the *enrichment level*. Relationally oriented programs assist the learner to develop more effective relationships with others—family, co-workers and so on. This type of program includes, for example, leadership training, sensitivity training, and parent effectiveness training. Self-actualization programs attempt to help learners to understand their own potentials and to actualize them. Women's reentry programs are an example. Finally, enrichment programs assist learners in making creative use of leisure time. Many general purpose public school and community college programs are directed toward this purpose.

Philosophy

For the sake of simplifying the complex, the discussion of philosophy here is divided into three traditions: the liberal-progressive, the countercritique, and the personal growth traditions. Each proposes different ends for adult education, and each differs somewhat in its vision for the good society.

Liberal-Progressive. The liberal-progressive tradition of adult education has been part of mainstream thought at least since the 1920s and represents an amalgam of liberal and progressive views. The centrality of this tradition to North American adult education is evidenced by the purposes of adult education discussed in the first portion of this chapter. Having given considerable attention to the liberal-progressive tradition earlier, the treatment will be more brief here.

Liberal and progressive educators generally agree on the prescribed ends for adult education. Adult education has a decidedly social role; its purpose is to abet the democratic order, which, although it is good, can be improved. These ends are evident in many of the authors previously cited such as Hart (1927), Lindeman (1926), Sheats, Jayne, and Spence (1953), and Knowles (1980).

At times, liberals and progressives seem to speak with one voice. Both liberals and progressives provided intellectual leadership in the early adult education movement, and the thinking of many adult educators was influenced by both perspectives. Yet, while both espouse similar ends, there is frequently a difference of opinion with regard to means. Liberal adult educators focus on cultivation of the intellect, which, as Elias and Merriam (1980) point out, includes a knowledge of facts, a systematic grasp of a subject matter or discipline, and the ability to critically assess and analyze. All three charac-

teristics are considered essential if the learner is to achieve the ultimate goal—wisdom. In liberal education, the teacher is viewed as the master of the subject matter who is charged with transferring knowledge to neophyte learners.

Traditionally, liberal education predominated in the realms of secondary and higher education, and many of the early intellectual leaders of adult education, such as Nicholas Murray Butler and James Russell, hailed from this milieu. Many felt that the critical skills fostered by liberal education were essential if adult citizens were to make the informed choices upon which the democratic order depended. Hence it was incumbent upon adult educators to extend liberal education to the masses of adults who had not attended institutions of higher learning or who had been too immature to benefit from it. The Great Books Program was probably the best known liberal adult education program (Elias and Merriam, 1980).

While agreeing that the good democratic society should be the goal of adult education, the progressives believed that learning should proceed from experience—from the situations of adults themselves rather than from abstractions or discipline-based subject matter. This belief mandated a highly learner-centered form of education involving the teacher as a guide and facilitator rather than as the guardian of knowledge. Eduard Lindeman was perhaps adult education's most eloquent proponent of the progressive tradition. His influence on more contemporary adult educators such as Malcolm Knowles has been profound (Knowles, 1987), and Lindeman mounted a consistent critique of liberal education, which he believed to be elitist (Stewart, 1987).

The Countercritique. What has been termed the *countercritique* here owes so much of its substance to Karl Marx that there is a temptation to refer to this tradition as Marxist. However, to do so may not do justice to some from the reproductionist school and to Paulo Freire. Like the thinkers of the liberal-progressive tradition, the countercritique focuses on the relation of education to society. However, unlike the liberal-progressive tradition, those associated with the countercritique consider capitalist democracy to be inherently flawed by structural inequalities that can be redressed only by substantial reordering of the social system.

Although it is difficult to discuss adequately the contribution of Marxist thought to the countercritique in the space provided, it is impossible to ignore Marx. As Carnoy (1982, p. 80) notes, a Marxist vision of society is class based. "Individual behavior is the product of historical forces, rooted in material conditions. As material conditions change, through class conflict, so do relations between individuals in different social positions, positions determined by the social organization of production and each person's relation to production." For Marx, the class structure is a product of the capitalist means of production, and society is necessarily unequal as the dominant bourgeoisie (ruling class) uses its control over the means of production to exploit the proletariat (working class). Resulting social inequality results in endemic class conflict. Youngman (1986) notes that in practice Marxist societies have taken two directions, socialism from above and socialism from

below. In the first case, as in the USSR, the emphasis is on state direction through the bureaucratic apparatus. In the second case, as in Cuba perhaps, the emphasis is on mass mobilization of the population. Youngman also notes two intellectual traditions of Marxism. One stresses economic determinism and the eventual collapse of capitalism, while the other, often termed *Marxist humanism*, stresses that humans possess the power of choice and can therefore determine their own fate.

Marx, in fact, said little about education, and the extension of Marxist ideas into education has been left to others. One of them is Gramsci (1971) who theorizes that dominance of the ruling class is exercised through ideological hegemony. More than coercing the proletariat through manipulation of social structure, the dominant class controls the ideological structure of society, which is passed on to subsequent generations through social institutions, most notably education. Intellectuals play a major role in this process. Traditional intellectuals abet the forces of hegemony, while intellectuals who maintain a connection with the working class can, at times, play a major role in formulating a counter hegemony that leads to substantial social reorganization (Carnoy, 1982). It might be said, by extension, that the role of adult education in a Gramscian perspective is to support and assist in the production of intellectuals who are oriented toward the working class.

Following Gramsci's analysis of the role of education in capitalist society, more contemporary writers have focused on the way in which the social structure reproduces itself through education. Apple (1982) notes two traditions. Authors such as Bowles and Gintis (1976) have focused primarily on the relationships among the economic means of production, class structure, and education, and they are decidedly Marxist in orientation. Others, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) for example, focus more on the reproduction of culture. Reproductionist arguments note that capitalist society must reproduce the class structure, skills, values, and belief systems upon which the system depends. Schooling operates as a filter through which individuals are slotted into various positions in the social order. While some are slotted into working class positions, others are destined to become managers and executives. Bourdieu and Passeron's concept of cultural capital provides insight into how the process works. Through basic childhood socialization, some individuals learn the behavior patterns required of those at the top of the social hierarchy while others learn the behaviors required to function at lower social strata. Language structures, deference behavior, and organizational skills are examples. These behaviors function as cultural capital. Those endowed with more cultural capital have a great advantage in the competition for spaces at the top of the social hierarchy while those with little cultural capital are impoverished in their efforts to rise.

Much of the counter critique of education has focused on the role of elementary, secondary, and higher education. In fact, it might be asked, if individuals are already "reproduced" by the time they have reached adulthood, what is the role of adult education in a reproductionist framework?

The answer may lie in the concept of empowerment, which is central to the thought of Paulo Freire.

Freire is a Brazilian adult educator whose philosophy was developed in relation to the oppression he witnessed in Latin American society. Freire (1970) believes that the oppressed lack critical consciousness of the forces that control their lives, and lacking that consciousness, they are powerless to redress the oppression that dominates their lives. The role of adult education is, through dialogue with learners, to facilitate acquisition of critical consciousness. Once learners become conscious of the forces that control their lives, they become empowered, and empowerment leads to action.

In summation, those of the counter-critique consider North American society to be inherently unequal, because the system perpetuates the dominance of favored groups over the less favored. Society, therefore, must be transformed, and one way to achieve this transformation is through adult education, which empowers learners to act in their own behalf.

Personal Growth. While thinkers associated with the personal growth tradition share with those of the liberal-progressive tradition the belief that society is essentially good, they tend to focus on the individual rather than on the society. An orientation to personal growth is closely associated with what Elias and Merriam (1980) call humanism. Humans, as opposed to animals, have the ability to choose; choice implies that learners are responsible for their own actions. The objective of adult education is to assist learners in making choices that maximize their human potential. Since learners are responsible for their actions, they should control learning content, process, and evaluation. As with the progressive tradition, humanist education is highly learner centered, and the educator is more properly a facilitator of learning than a conveyor of knowledge.

An orientation toward personal growth became very evident in the 1950s as the group dynamics movement developed. And Malcolm Knowles (1980), whose ideas are also influenced by progressivism, popularized personal growth ideas with his technology of andragogy in the 1970s.

Recent Trends. An analysis of the literature of adult education leads to the conclusion that thought regarding the purposes and philosophies of adult education has generally revolved around social philosophy, an investigation into the relationship between adult education and human problems. This emphasis remains and is evidenced by new attention to the work of Lindeman (Brookfield, 1984b; Stewart, 1987). Yet, while the thinkers of the early adult education movement generally perceived society as being good, in recent years there has been a more concerted critique of the very foundations of society as embodied in the thought of the reproductionists, neo-Marxists, and Paulo Freire (1970). The thought of those associated with the counter-critique, while still retaining its critical element, has started to develop into an operational pedagogy (Freire, 1973; Youngman, 1986). The personal growth tradition also has received recent attention in the work of Mezirow (1981), who, following the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas,

has developed a critical theory of adult education focusing on perspective transformation.

While attention to social philosophy still predominates, consideration has also been given recently to analytical philosophy (Lawson, 1979; Patterson, 1979) and to phenomenology (Stanage, 1987). Yet, while currents and crosscurrents, critiques and counter critiques abound in the thought of adult education, it is still possible to derive a set of core principles that form the basic foundation of the field:

1. Whether society is basically good or is inherently flawed, it can and should be improved. In this, adult education can and should play a major role.
2. If individuals, and ultimately society, are to prosper, learning must continue throughout life.
3. Adults are capable of learning and should be treated with dignity and respect.
4. All adults should have access to learning the things required for basic functioning in society.
5. Although adults may or may not differ from preadults in respect to the basic cognitive processes of learning, the context of adult education differs substantially from the context of preadulthood. Hence adults should be educated differentially from preadults.

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